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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5913  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3616  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3475  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4155  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1261  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4108

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001497

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI TX

SUBJECT: HEAD OF TURKMEN DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
INSTITUTE FOCUSED ON NEW LAWS

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During his visit to Ashgabat, DAS Krol met the GOTX's Head of the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights Shirin Akhmedova. The meeting focused on the Institute's adherence to directives by President Berdimuhamedov and a long list of laws the GOTX is working on related to democracy and human rights. Akhmedova lamented that few outside Turkmenistan realize how much the GOTX has done to support democracy and human rights, giving all the credit to President Berdimuhamedov. She underscored that Turkmenistan is a relatively young democracy, admitting there are problems with establishing and implementing new laws. She suggested that international organizations might be able to conduct prison visits in the future, but to date the GOTX has not granted non-Turkmen organizations access. She asserted that strengthening national laws was the key to minimizing problems with child labor abuses, religious intolerance, and other potential human rights violations, noting that work on implementation of those laws must proceed after the adoption of new laws. END SUMMARY.

CREATING NEW LAWS

¶2. (C) On November 17, DAS Krol met with the Head of the State Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan Shirin Akhmedova, who immediately launched into a lengthy list of laws and international conferences with which the GOTX was involved. According to Akhmedova, the Institute works closely with other Turkmen ministries and departments in addition to collaborating with international organizations such as OSCE and the EU in order to draft much-needed laws pertaining to workers rights, children's and women's rights and human rights in general. She explained that the main reason for these new laws was because current laws were drafted during Soviet times before Turkmenistan became an independent, democratic state.

THE LITTLE KNOWN INSTITUTE

¶3. (C) Akhmedova reported that during bilateral meetings in

Washington in May 2009, it became obvious to her that few people realize that the Institute existed and how much work her office does to promote democracy and human rights in Turkmenistan. Since the Washington meetings, she has made a goal to increase her Institute's participation in international conferences and conventions in order to show the international community how serious the GOTX takes democracy and human rights.

#### TURKMEN WORKERS "SAFE" FROM ECONOMIC CRISIS

¶4. (C) Akhmedova opined that although many nations have had to ensure that workers receive necessary government assistance and subsidies as a result of the global economic crisis, the GOTX had sufficient reserves to pay all its workers, and more important the global economic crisis did not affect Turkmenistan. She credited the Turkmen president with the foresight to ensure that the Turkmen budget was insulated from negative global economic impacts, highlighting that no Turkmen governmental employee has missed a paycheck. She added that in April of 2009, a new Labor Code was passed and implementation of labor laws that better corresponded to a market economy began in July. She asserted that the new Labor Code was founded on the "highest international labor standards."

#### LAWS AND IMPLEMENTATION

¶5. (C) After Akhmedova finished her lengthy list of the Institute's accomplishments, DAS Krol asked her to comment on the GOTX's ability to implement laws, especially those laws

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that meet international rights standards. Akhmedova admitted that implementation is a problem, but held that the Turkmen president's strong support for laws that protect Turkmen citizens will ensure that laws are ultimately implemented. She added that the "active Turkmen Parliament" works closely with her Institute to enact much-needed laws. She acknowledged that training provided by international organizations has helped Turkmenistan immensely. She maintained that information regarding all government programs for increasing democracy and human rights programs are well known throughout the country, and are frequently mentioned on all state media.

#### PRISON VISITS IN THE FUTURE?

¶6. (C) When asked about access to Turkmen prisons by international, humanitarian organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, Akhmedova said that dialogue between this organization and the GOTX continues. To date, this organization does not have permission to access and monitor prisons, but the Institute continues to collaborate with the Turkmen Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor General's Office, and outside legal experts for recommendations in order to revise the current Turkmen Criminal Code. Akhmedova did not state when ICRC representatives would have access to a Turkmen prison.

#### CHILD LABOR

¶7. (C) According to Akhmedova, strong support from President Berdimuhamedov and the Parliament had helped Turkmenistan to dramatically decrease any child labor violations throughout the country. She credited the GOTX's ability to maintain healthy currency reserves for purchases of agricultural equipment, which in turn has significantly decreased the need for picking cotton by hand. GOTX participation in the Geneva International Convention on the Rights of a Child, she added, has resulted in the creation of laws that forbid child labor in the country. She stressed that the GOTX has taken any child labor violations seriously, and swift prosecution of offenders has helped to nearly eradicate child labor.

#### RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

¶ 8. (C) DAS Krol also inquired about the state of religious minorities in Turkmenistan, given media reports claiming that certain religious groups were under pressure from the government. Akhmedova explained that some members of religious minorities are trying to use their religious affiliation to avoid mandatory military service, and this is something she personally felt was inappropriate for a citizen of Turkmenistan to attempt to do, adding that every Turkmen should serve in the military. She stressed that the GOTX has partnered with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) based in D.C. to obtain recommendations for laws concerning religious groups. She again felt that the formation of new laws regarding religious minorities would clear up any future "religious situations."

¶ 9. (C) COMMENT. The Turkmen Institute of Democracy and Human Rights is an active organization. Although Akhmedova seems dedicated to getting new laws passed, real social change will only take place when the new laws are implemented. That will require as yet undetected political will beginning at the top of the government and extending throughout every layer. At the same time, other international organizations in Ashgabat have hailed Akhmedova as an effective proponent for democracy and human rights given that Turkmenistan is still very much an autocratic state. Akhmedova plans to increase the GOTX's participation in international organizations and conventions, which is clearly a step in the right direction. END COMMENT.

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